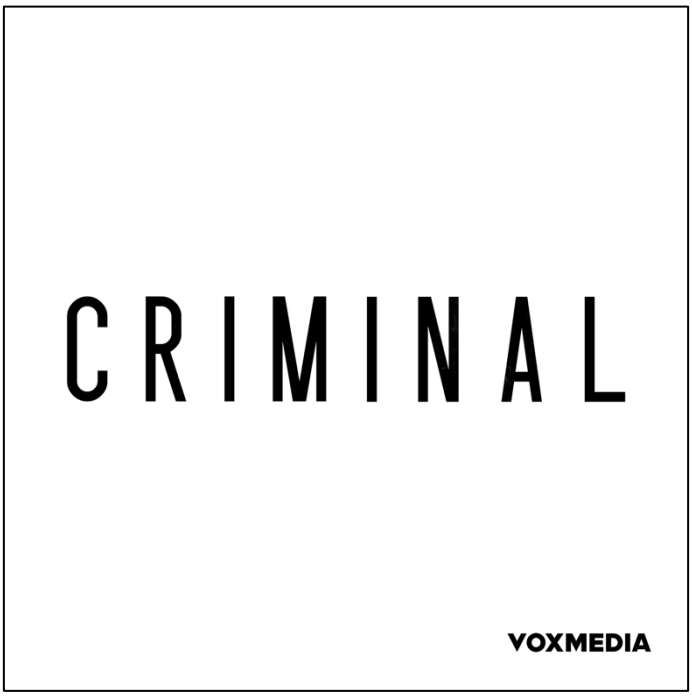


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Episode 264: The Strike
Air Date: April 12, 2024

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) In the spring of 1914, a man named Ivy Lee received a job offer to come work for the Rockefellers. They said they could really use his help.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Ivy Lee was 36 and lived in Philadelphia where he worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad. He did PR for them. He'd started out as a reporter, but later realized he could use what he knew about journalism to the advantage of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

AMY WESTERVELT: He's really developed something of a reputation. He's hosted the first ever press conference for the Pennsylvania Railroad. And he's really shaking things up in terms of how the media works and how corporations deal with the media.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Journalist Amy Westervelt.

AMY WESTERVELT: Up to that point, there had been a pretty adversarial relationship between the media and industrialists. Companies, in general, would just try to avoid talking to the media or would hide information. And Ivy Lee was like, no, you should be forthcoming, and that will actually help you to shape the story and tell people what you want them to hear.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Ivy Lee had created what's been called the world's first press release.

AMY WESTERVELT: And it was so new that when he first started sending them out, papers would just run them.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Including the *New York Times.* Amy Westervelt says media outlets weren't used to having executives offered to them for interviews.

AMY WESTERVELT: So it took the media a minute to realize that this wasn't being done in good faith.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Ivy Lee was interested in the job with the Rockefellers. They were one of the richest and most powerful families in America. They wanted to bring him on as a consultant. They said they would let him keep his day job.

The Rockefellers had a problem. People were protesting in front of their offices. They were saying John D. Rockefeller Jr. was responsible for the murder of 2 women and 11 children who'd been found dead in an underground room underneath some floorboards near a coal mine in Colorado.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s father had always told him not to engage with the press or the public, but he was starting to doubt his father's way of doing things. He wanted people to hear his side of the story. He told Ivy Lee that he felt misunderstood.

He had asked friends for advice. They either told him to say nothing or to take out ads in major newspapers and explain himself that way. But Ivy Lee said those were all terrible ideas. He had something completely different in mind.

AMY WESTERVELT: And that's sort of the genesis of corporate PR.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) I'm Phoebe Judge. This is *Criminal.*

[MUSIC PLAYING]

John D. Rockefeller Sr. was born in 1839 in Richford, New York. And he became America's first billionaire. He started one of the biggest companies in the world, Standard Oil.

AMY WESTERVELT: And it's interesting when you talk to historians of oil, they always talk about Rockefeller as being a particular type of oilman. He was very East Coast Protestant approach to oil versus later on you get what they call the Texas Wildcat approach to oil.

PHOEBE JUDGE: I mean, I have this idea of even very successful oil guys being out there right in the fields, being like those Texas guys, getting themselves covered with oil for a couple of years before they really strike it big, but this wasn't the case with Rockefeller. I mean, he was never covered in oil.

AMY WESTERVELT: He wasn't always rich, I think, that's important to note. But he's like in a suit in every single picture there is of him. [LAUGHS]

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Growing up, John D. Rockefeller's father was often gone for long periods of time. He sold different types of treatments and potions to people with cancer. And sometimes he pretended to be deaf and blind so people would give him money.

Rockefeller's mother was strict and very religious. After he dropped out of high school, he worked as an assistant bookkeeper. And then along with his brother, he got involved in the new oil industry.

AMY WESTERVELT: His way in was doing deals with people who had land that had reserves on it and then buying up as much land as possible. And really, like, he really thought through the idea of owning as much of the supply chain as he could and that being the ticket to making it big.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) He and his wife had four daughters and a son. They were also religious and strict about money.

AMY WESTERVELT: He really felt like his religiousness and his rigidity was responsible for his success. He also was a little bit of a believer in the idea that God was rewarding him with these oil discoveries that he was having so much luck with.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) And then in the early 1900s, a journalist named Ida Tarbell published a 19-part expose detailing Rockefeller's monopoly on the industry. Ida Tarbell was one of the pioneers of long-form investigative journalism. She was born in a log cabin in Pennsylvania.

Her father's oil business had started doing well until the Rockefellers started taking over local gas and oil companies. Ida Tarbell wrote that her father started to come home "with a grim look on his face." His business partner died by suicide.

In her expose, she described John D. Rockefeller Sr. as someone who was "money-mad." And she wrote about Standard Oil, "They've never played fair." People all over the country read her reporting. Rockefeller Sr. became very unpopular and has been described as "the most hated man in America." At 58, he mostly retired.

His son, John D. Rockefeller Jr., had grown up in New York. He was shy and insecure. And since he was a teenager, he'd experienced so-called "breakdowns."

He was a good student. And after he graduated college, he joined his father's company. In 1904, the Rockefellers took over the biggest coal company in Southern Colorado called Colorado Fuel and Iron, which was supplying the expanding railroads. Thousands of coal miners worked for them.

PHOEBE JUDGE: What was the coal mining industry like in the early 1900s?

AMY WESTERVELT: It was dirty and dangerous and coal miners were really down a mine for multiple hours a day. This is also pre any kind of limits on workdays. So you're looking at 10 to 12 hours a day.

And there's no mechanized help at this point either. So they're using pickaxes and hauling stuff out in wagons. It's definitely rough work. They're not getting a lot of breaks. And the idea of being paid for working overtime is not even a glint in anyone's eye at this point.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Coal miners were usually paid by the ton for the coal they produced, not by the hour or day they'd worked. A lot of people died on the job, sometimes from explosions caused by natural gases inside the mines, sometimes from falling rocks. The roof of a mine could cave in trapping everyone inside the mountain. When miners got off work, everything was shaped around the company.

AMY WESTERVELT: These coal mines are in the middle of nowhere. People need a place to live. And coal miners were often in the position of having to live in company towns and really having every aspect of their lives controlled by the company.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Coal miners had to pay rent to the coal companies for the shacks where they lived near the mines some of them with their families. The coal company opened saloons and stores in the camps where they often charged high prices.

AMY WESTERVELT: Everything was being deducted from their pay back to the company. So this was a great situation for coal companies. They had to provide a limited amount of housing and food, and it greatly reduced their labor costs. But this was not great for coal workers.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) The Rockefellers hired a man named Lamont Bowers to oversee the mines in Colorado.

SCOTT MARTELLE: Lamont Montgomery Bowers.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Author Scott Martelle.

SCOTT MARTELLE: And he was a hard driver of men, a racist, openly disdainful of the miners who were working for them. And he was in a large way responsible, if not for making conditions bad, for not doing anything to make conditions better. So he knew full well what life was like in those coal mines and in those coal camps. And that was perfectly fine with him.

There was an observation made back around that time that the coal mine operators valued the mules more than the men because if a man died on the job, they could hire somebody else. If a mule died, well, they had to buy a new mule. So they treated the men with pretty much open disdain. It was very, very cold hearted.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Coal companies hired mine guards to keep an eye on everything. They were far away from any kind of law enforcement. So managers had complete control of the camps. Coal miners in Colorado had walked off the job several times. Mines where workers had managed to unionize were generally safer.

SCOTT MARTELLE: They tended to be in better physical shape because the union was there to argue on behalf of the men that this place isn't safe. We're not going to go in there. You need to do X, Y, and Z before our workers will actually take part in mining that shaft.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) But it was very difficult for workers to unionize.

SCOTT MARTELLE: If they knew, if their people were found out, they'd be summarily fired in, some cases beaten, maybe even killed.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) The coal company placed spies among the workers to report back on what workers discussed and hired people who spoke different languages.

SCOTT MARTELLE: If they brought in a bunch of people from other cultures and other countries who didn't share common languages, it would make it harder for the union organizers to be effective. So by the time 1913 came around, there was, I don't know, more than a dozen different languages, I suppose, being spoken in the camps.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) But in 1913, most of the people in the mines in Colorado agreed that things had to change. They announced that they were going to go on strike. They'd put together a list of demands for the mine operators.

SCOTT MARTELLE: All of them quaint in retrospect not exorbitantly long workdays, to have the right to collective bargaining, the right to belong to a union that was the main flashpoint.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) But the mine operators refused. So one morning in late September in the middle of a big rainstorm, long lines of people walked out. There are more than 12,000 of them, coal miners, their wives and children carrying their belongings or pushing wagons and carts. They knew that as long as the strike went on, they couldn't return to their homes in the mining towns which were owned by the companies.

SCOTT MARTELLE: And they bought a whole bunch of tents and camp equipment, including mass tents and that kind of thing and set up some tent colonies. So as these folks were coming out of the canyons after being evicted from their homes, they were settling into these tent colonies.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) The biggest of the tent colonies was at Ludlow where there was a small train station. Over 1,000 people moved into tents there. One of them was a young woman named Mary Thomas.

She'd grown up in a pro-union mining family in Wales, but her husband had left her and their two children and gone to America Mary Thomas decided to track him down and give him a message. She found him in Colorado.

MARY THOMAS: [ARCHIVAL] I just wanted to meet him to tell him that I was quitting him. He never quit me. And I quit him right there. And I became very popular with the men. And I killed him because that flaming red hair of mine really brought him home.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) This is an oral history of Mary Thomas recorded in 1974. Mary had nowhere to go and moved into a tent at Ludlow with her children. She refused to stay with her husband.

She described how people tried to make themselves comfortable in the tents. They put down wooden floorboards, and Mary used old orange crates as shelves. Quote, "I put my bright bedspreads on the cots with curtains to match, which I hung over the two small windows." Every morning, someone raised the American flag in the tent colony. They had a big tent for union meetings where Mary Thomas would sing.

SCOTT MARTELLE: She had a beautiful singing voice by all accounts. So she would entertain the people in the camps and in the meetings with songs and leading sing alongs and that kind of thing.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Mary Thomas had made friends with some of the other women in the camp.

MARY THOMAS: [ARCHIVAL] A lot of them were quite happy there, not quite happy, but they figured it was better than nothing. And it was.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) She would meet two of her friends for coffee in the morning, and they would sometimes sit outside in the sun. Mary recalled, "What a bleak view. For miles and miles, there was uneven prairie with small hills scattered all about." Things got more difficult as the months wore on.

SCOTT MARTELLE: That winter there was a blizzard that dropped like 4 or 5 feet in some of these mountain towns. It was difficult. I mean, there were a lot of coal stoves in wood stoves in the tents themselves. They tried to keep warm, but it was not an easy thing.

But life in that part of the country in that era wasn't easy to begin with. These are guys who were moving out of poorly constructed shanties in the company towns into tents with wooden floors on the high plains. By the end of the first week or 10 days or so, the strikers who are left were folks who were determined to have union representation.

I get the sense that the folks who decided to stick it out had a deep sense of resolve. So they weren't going to go away easily. Both sides saw this as a protracted battle. Nobody saw an easy victory. Rockefeller was by no means going to capitulate.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) John D. Rockefeller Jr. wrote to his mine operator in Colorado, Lamont Bowers, "Whatever the outcome, we will stand by you to the end." He later said, "The records show that the conditions have been admirable. A strike has been imposed upon the company from the outside." They ignored the strike and began hiring new people to continue operations.

SCOTT MARTELLE: Mine production took a hit in the immediate aftermath of the walkout, but slowly over the next two or three months, it began getting back to near normal production, which was one of the big problems that the union organizers were facing because if you couldn't shut down production, then you really didn't have much of a bargaining position with the mine operators.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) In December, Rockefeller Jr. wrote to Lamont Bowers, "I feel hopeful the worst is over and that the situation will improve daily." But there was a lot of violence. Two men had turned up dead, and gunfights were breaking out between strikers and mine guards. Local gun shops were running out of guns, and people were bringing them in from elsewhere.

SCOTT MARTELLE: A lot of weapons, a lot of them were brought in by the mine operators and the mine guards for their side. But the union was procuring weapons also. And there was a guy for the Red Cross who happened to be in the district doing a report, and he witnessed a whole bunch of strike supporters moving rifles from a hotel into the back of a car and driving that into the strike district. There was a lot of illicit arms dealing going on to support these guys.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) And then mine operators began ordering machine guns. We'll be right back.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

One morning in January, 1914, months into the strike, a woman in her 70s got off the train at Trinidad station near the Ludlow tent camp. Members of the state militia immediately detained her. They'd been waiting for her. Her name was Mary Harris Jones, but everybody called her Mother Jones.

SCOTT MARTELLE: Mother Jones was a fantastic figure in that era. She was a radical union supporter, a union organizer. So wherever there was a labor fight going on, somehow Mother Jones would magically appear in the midst of it and act as an agitator. She'd give speeches to rile up the union forces. She was almost a semi-mythical figure.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Mother Jones usually wore glasses, a hat, and a long black dress. She was known for her powerful speeches. Lots of people came to see her. Newspapers called her "the most well-known woman in America" and "a folk hero." Before the Colorado strike had officially started, Mother Jones had toured the area, giving speeches and encouraging miners to strike.

SCOTT MARTELLE: And she's just cursing up a blue streak and exhorting the men-- there were primarily men in the mines-- to fight for themselves, fight for their lives, at one point said some of the effect that if you guys won't fight for yourselves, send the women and let them do it

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Mother Jones often focused on the women and children who lived in coal towns. She wanted families to be involved in the strikes. She'd grown up in Ireland during the Great Famine when about 1 million people, mostly poor farmers, died.

After immigrating to America, she worked as a teacher and dressmaker. She lived in Memphis with her husband and four children when a yellow fever epidemic broke out in 1867 which killed her family. She wrote, "One by one, my four little children sickened and died... I sat alone through nights of grief."

She also wrote, "The rich and the well-to-do fled the city." Author Elliot J. Gorn writes that as a poor, aging, immigrant widow, Mary Jones invented the character of Mother Jones, and that it freed her from expectations of how a woman should behave. Quote, "She wore antique black dresses in public, and she began exaggerating her age."

SCOTT MARTELLE: She was very much an agitator and a provocateur, so much so that she wound up getting arrested pretty much wherever she showed up.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) In Colorado, Mother Jones was eventually locked up in a local hospital. Authorities said she was, quote, "dangerous to the peace of the community."

SCOTT MARTELLE: Their lives would be a lot easier if she wasn't in the strike zone. So they wanted to get her out of there.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) People were furious when they heard that Mother Jones had been arrested. A group of women organized a march, which turned violent. Mary Thomas, who lived in the Ludlow tent camp, was arrested after arguing with an officer.

She was in prison for 11 days. At night, she would stand by the window and sing the song "Union Forever." The men in the jail would sing along with her.

MARY THOMAS: [ARCHIVAL, SINGING] Union forever, hurrah boys [INAUDIBLE] down with the [INAUDIBLE] up with the [INAUDIBLE] coming all the way [INAUDIBLE] the perfect fire of the union.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) The violence continued. And the mine operators decided to bring out a weapon they'd made out of an old car.

SCOTT MARTELLE: If you can envision an early model of a Humvee with no windows or roof, that's what it was. It was like a flatbed truck with no top and with a machine gun bolted to the back.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Someone came up with a nickname for it, "The Death Special."

SCOTT MARTELLE: And they would drive along the roads quite often not even firing it, just as a physical presence that thing was a threat.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) To protect themselves and their families from gunfire, some of the strikers in Ludlow removed their tents' wooden floorboards and dug trenches so that a safe place to hide inside the tent. In one tent, they dug a larger trench. Scott Martelle describes it as an underground bunker, which was meant to be a safe place for the camp's pregnant women to give birth.

The local sheriff wrote to the governor. Scott Martelle writes that the Sheriff expressed a, quote, "Growing sense of helplessness in maintaining the peace." Mine operators wanted the governor to send in the National Guard militia.

And eventually, that's what he did. Once the National Guard arrived, things seemed to quiet down. And Lamont Bowers wrote in a letter to John D. Rockefeller Jr., "The strike, we believe, is wearing itself out."

SCOTT MARTELLE: The governor began withdrawing some of the National Guard units thinking that things had calmed down, they didn't need that many soldiers. The state budget really couldn't afford to keep paying these guys. So he began withdrawing units over the winter.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) But there is still a small group of soldiers in the area. Many of them were former mine guards. Scott Martelle writes that the strikers were nervous. And the remaining militiamen worried that the strikers would attack them now that they were a smaller group.

April 19 was Easter Sunday for the Greek Orthodox Church. And while the Ludlow tent colony celebrated-- many of the miners were Greek-- militiamen showed up with their rifles to watch.

Things were tense. And members of the militia had heard rumors that a man was being held against his will at the tent camp. So the day after Easter Sunday, they went looking for him. Soon, a group of militiamen started moving towards the Ludlow colony carrying a machine gun.

The striking coal miners saw them and came out of their tents with rifles. One of the camp leaders was just outside the tent colony and saw what was happening. He started running back towards the tents waving a white handkerchief.

SCOTT MARTELLE: This was in the early morning. The National Guard had moved in machine guns doing a huge show of force. And like in most skirmishes, both sides say the other one fired first. But gunfire began ringing out, and then soon bullets were flying in both directions.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Mary Thomas remembered the moment she realized something was wrong.

MARY THOMAS: [ARCHIVAL] And one morning, we just got up and, feeding my children oatmeal and- milk and oatmeal. And I heard a boom. We all rushed out to see what was wrong.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Someone came running up to them, telling them they had to leave the camp.

MARY THOMAS: [ARCHIVAL] They're going to-- they claim they are going to clean this camp out today. And we were all stunned. We didn't know what to do, where to go.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) She gathered her own and a friend's children and started running. She wrote, "The prairie was covered with human beings running in all directions, like ants. We all ran as we were, some with babies on their backs, in whatever clothes we were wearing."

She saw a friend who was trying to run with her three small children wearing only slippers on her feet. Mary took her baby, and they kept running until she dropped a shoe. When she stopped to pull it back on, a bullet clipped her wrist. They made it to safety and hid. Mary's friend whose baby she had carried tore a piece of her petticoat to wrap around Mary's bleeding wrist.

SCOTT MARTELLE: The armed strikers began moving out of the camp to draw fire away from the tent colony itself. And they were moving up into the edges of a hillside and down into a ravine, which gave them a little bit of protection from the National Guard.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) In the tent camp, a seven-year-old girl named Helen Korich watched as her father got out his gun to go join the fighting. Helen, who was still wearing her Easter dress, didn't want him to leave and clung to him outside their tent until her sister came out to get her. "She pulled me by the hair until I let go of him," Helen later recalled. "I knew my dad was going to get killed."

Helen and her mother, brother, and two sisters ran out of their tent and towards a water well where a group of women and children were hiding. The family dog followed them. Bullets were flying everywhere. The dog was shot.

Helen said, "I remember how quiet everything was, except for the shooting." Some people hid in the trenches that had been dug under the tents floorboards. A group of women-- one of them was pregnant-- hid in the underground bunker with their children.

SCOTT MARTELLE: It was large enough to fit a pregnant woman who was giving birth and the midwives or whoever was helping her with it. And as the gunfire broke out, 4 mothers and 11 children slid underneath the wooden floor.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) All day, reinforcements kept arriving for both sides. But then in the evening, some of the militiamen moved into the Ludlow tent colony looting the tents and carrying torches.

SCOTT MARTELLE: And eyewitnesses saw national guardsmen with torches going from tent to tent to tent setting these things up, lighting these things up.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Scott Martelle says there's no evidence that the national guardsmen had been ordered to set fire to the colony.

SCOTT MARTELLE: But they seemed, based on eyewitness accounts, just bent on destroying this thing. The day was over, the gunfire was pretty much done, and they moved in and torched it. The National Guard tried to blame it on an errant bullet or a cold stove that got knocked over by a bullet and then the flames were fanned by the wind, but there was hardly any wind that day.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) We'll be right back.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

The tent with the bunker under the floorboards started burning.

SCOTT MARTELLE: And the women are arguing among themselves, debating among themselves whether they should get up and out of the hole and make a run for it or if they'd be safer there. And they finally decided they'd be safer where they were. But they weren't anticipating what the burning tent above them would do.

It began getting hot. The floor began smoldering. A couple of the kids reached up to the floor and got their fingers burned. So they're huddling in the bottom of this hole not realizing that the fire was taking all the oxygen out of where they were hiding. And fairly soon, they began slipping into unconsciousness.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Early the next morning, one of the women-- her name was Mary Petrucci-- woke up in the bunker. She tried to wake up her three small children, but none of them moved. Mary Petrucci and one other woman were the only ones who'd survived the night in the underground bunker.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Mary Thomas and her children got out of the camp and survived. Later, she went back to the tent colony.

MARY THOMAS: [ARCHIVAL] When I went back, all I saw was old sticks on the ground and iron beds. It just looked like ghosts.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) News of what had happened at Ludlow started spreading. For a couple of days, the militia didn't move the bodies of people who'd been killed by gunshots on the prairie. People traveling past Ludlow by train would look out the windows and see the bodies on the ground. They were horrified. And then the union issued a call to arms.

SCOTT MARTELLE: And armed men began making their way to Southern Colorado. Their argument was that clearly they were getting no protection from local police. They were getting killed by the National Guard, a state agency.

So it was going to be up to them to protect themselves, their wives, and their children. And nobody has a clear estimate of how many folks came into the district, but it was scores, if not hundreds of men who came in to help. And over the next 10 days was just relentless gunfire and bloodshed.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Then President Woodrow Wilson realized he had to get involved. He'd contacted John D. Rockefeller Jr. and urged him to settle things with the strikers. But John D. Rockefeller Jr. refused. So eventually, the president sent in the federal army and dismissed the state militia. The president said he was not sending in the army to end or settle the strike but to keep peace.

SCOTT MARTELLE: And once the US Army got in there, all the violence just kind of drifted away. From the miner's standpoint, their enemy was the National Guard not the US government or the US Army.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Several months later, the strike ended.

SCOTT MARTELLE: So at least 75 people were killed over the course of this thing, and nobody was held criminally accountable for any of it.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) People started calling it the Ludlow Massacre.

SCOTT MARTELLE: The Rockefellers didn't really respond at all at first. But as the national outrage spread, even the *New York Times* call out the National Guard for what they had done. And the *New York Times* was notoriously anti-union at the time.

Public pressure began mounting, and John D. Rockefeller Jr. spoke at a congressional hearing and just came across horribly, I mean, didn't make a good defense of what they had done, seemed unconcerned about the violence, about the carnage. He was excoriated in the newspapers at that point.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) John D. Rockefeller Jr. went looking for someone who could help him manage the bad press.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

AMY WESTERVELT: So Ivy Lee gets on a train, and he goes all the way from Pennsylvania to Colorado to see what's going on on the ground in Ludlow.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) And then he started writing a type of newsletter or a news bulletin that he would send to what he called leaders of public opinion all over the country, including newspaper editors. His mailing list had 19,000 names. The newsletter would present the situation in Colorado in a way that might gain support for Rockefeller Jr. and the mine operators. Ivy Lee put together the newsletters in Pennsylvania, but he wanted it to look like they were coming straight out of Colorado. So he first sent them there where they were postmarked and sent out.

AMY WESTERVELT: And in those little newsletters, he claims that most of the people striking were not even really coal miners, that they were hired actors who are part of a national labor campaign, and that Mother Jones has orchestrated the whole thing. And then for some reason, he works in this idea that Mother Jones was actually running a brothel in town. At the time, she was quite old and had spent quite a long time being a labor organizer, never had run a brothel. So the idea that would be somehow a way to discredit her was an interesting choice on his end, but he kind of throws everything he can at it.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Amy Westervelt writes that Ivy Lee's biographers disagree on whether he was well-intentioned.

AMY WESTERVELT: He's written a whole book about how important it is for companies to be honest and forthcoming in their communications with both the media and the public and that they should never hide things or spin things because it's inauthentic, and it will never work. But then he also has this really famous quote, "What are facts but my interpretation of the truth?"

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) In one of his newsletters, Ivy Lee detailed how much the Rockefellers personally profited from their coal company. He wanted to show people that most of the money went back into the company, which he said was good for the state, too.

PHOEBE JUDGE: I mean, this is like the first crisis control.

AMY WESTERVELT: Yes. So Ivy League starts to do PR in the late 1800s. And you have this confluence of factors in the US at that time. You have the first regulations being passed on business.

You have the vote expanding to people who don't necessarily share the interests of the Rockefellers. You have journalists who are doing big investigative pieces. All of that stuff is happening around this time.

And companies are a little bit caught off guard by it. They've not really had to deal with any restrictions on their activities or any criticism from the public or anything like that. And Ivy Lee goes, aha, I can help them solve this problem and communicate to the public in a way that helps to shape things in their direction.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) But the newspapers had printed photographs of dead bodies near the Ludlow tent camp, and people were shocked.

AMY WESTERVELT: The Rockefellers look really bad. None of their justifications are working, really no one was buying anything that the Rockefellers were selling during this period probably because of Mother Jones. She had done a really good job of getting a lot of information out about what was really going on at Ludlow. And she was a very trustworthy source at this point.

So he sort of realizes, oh, the bigger problem here is that people don't trust the Rockefellers. The reason I didn't win this information war is that people trust Mother Jones and the workers more than they trust the Rockefellers. So, how do I get the public to trust the Rockefellers? And so he kind of pivots and says, let's have Mother Jones and some of the leaders of this miner strike come and meet with the Rockefellers.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Ivy Lee convinced John D. Rockefeller Jr. to go on field trips to meet with miners in their homes where he could talk with them and their families and ask them questions. And Ivy Lee made sure that a team of reporters were present.

AMY WESTERVELT: They really bend over backwards to make amends with the labor unions. And he gets Rockefeller going on quite a few different philanthropic efforts. And that's where things start to turn in favor of the Rockefellers, after Ludlow.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Ivy Lee sent a leaflet to mineworkers letting them know that the company now had an employee representation plan. And he put up posters at the mines. One of them read, "We want every man who works for the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company to feel that the company is his friend."

Ivy Lee's name wasn't mentioned in the newsletters he wrote, but people started talking about this PR consultant who was working with the Rockefellers. Some people thought he was very smart. Others thought he twisted the truth to please his employers.

The writer Upton Sinclair nicknamed him "Poison Ivy." Other critics have called him the master of staged public opinion. He kept working with the Rockefellers.

AMY WESTERVELT: They end up hiring him to work on both Standard Oil and as their personal PR guy for the rest of his life. And part of what he does for them is this whole philanthropic endeavor where he really starts to position the Rockefeller name as being synonymous with philanthropy.

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Before Ludlow, Rockefeller Jr. had already been focused on philanthropy. He supported organizations like the YMCA. Ivy Lee wanted to make sure people knew about this to boost Rockefeller's image as a Christian man.

Rockefeller Jr. earmarked his donations to Bible study and something called the industrial department, which aimed to, quote, "Promote right relationships between management and labor." After Ludlow, he particularly focused on the YMCA Colorado, which opened new programs specifically for miners. Some say that Ludlow made John D. Rockefeller Jr. more committed to philanthropy.

AMY WESTERVELT: He really turns the Rockefellers from being the evil rich guys to benevolent benefactors in about a decade.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) Four years after the Ludlow massacre in 1918, there was a ceremony in Ludlow to memorialize the dead. The First World War hadn't ended yet, and people weren't talking much about Ludlow anymore. The coal miners and union organizers had collected enough money among themselves to build a monument in Ludlow.

Mary Petrucci, who had survived in the underground bunker but lost her three children, unveiled it, a granite monument of a miner and a miner's wife who holds a small child in her arms. The ceremony had already started when a car came up the dirt road and a messenger got out. He went straight to some of the event organizers and quietly explained why he was there.

He handed them a card. It said John D. Rockefeller Jr.. Rockefeller got out of the car with his wife and one of his advisors.

Scott Martelle writes that he stayed in the background listening to the speeches. People were remembering the dead in different languages, and Rockefeller was barely noticed. He hadn't been invited to the event. When the ceremony was almost over, he got in his car and left.

The striker's main demand, union representation, was not met. And Scott Martelle writes that little changed for mineworkers. The Ludlow massacre has been called one of the bleakest and blackest episodes of American labor history. Some reporters have said that Ludlow "changed the nation's attitude toward labor and capital."

SCOTT MARTELLE: It became a cause that helped put a lot of energy into the union organizing movement. And it became a huge rallying cry for the union movement. Woody Guthrie did a song "Ludlow." So it sort of entered its way into the consciousness of the nation.

WOODY GUTHRIE: [SINGING "LUDLOW MASSACRE"] It was early spring time and the strike was on. They drove us miners out of doors, out from the houses that the company owned, we moved into tents up at old Ludlow. I was worried bad about my children. Soldiers guarding the railroad bridge. Every once in a while a bullet would fly, kick up gravel under my feet. We were so afraid you'd kill our children, we dug us a cave... [FADES OUT]

PHOEBE JUDGE: (As narrator) *Criminal* is created by Lauren Spohrer and me. Nadia Wilson is our Senior Producer. Katie Bishop is our Supervising Producer. Our producers are Susannah Roberson, Jackie Sojico, Lilly Clark, Lene Sillesen, and Gabrielle Berbey.

Our show is mixed and engineered by Veronica Simonetti. This episode was mixed by Emma Munger and Veronica Simonetti. Julienne Alexander makes original illustrations for each episode of *Criminal.* You can see them at thisiscriminal.com. And sign up for our newsletter at thisiscriminal.com/newsletter

Scott Martelle's book is *Blood Passion: The Ludlow Massacre and Class War in the American West.* Amy Westervelt's podcast is *Drilled.* Season three of the show is called *The Mad Men of Big Oil,* and it includes several episodes on Ivy Lee.

We hope you'll join our new membership program, Criminal Plus. Once you sign up, you can listen to *Criminal* episodes without any ads, and you'll get bonus episodes with me and *Criminal* co-creator Lauren Spohrer, too. To learn more, go to thisiscriminal.com/plus. We're on Facebook and Twitter @CriminalShow and Instagram @Criminal_Podcast. We're also on YouTube at youtube.com/criminalpodcast.

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[MUSIC PLAYING]